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ABSTRACT

Library use instruction designed specifically for limited-English-proficient (LEP) students is discussed briefly and library skill activities used with this population at Union County College (New Jersey) are described. It is noted that many students from other countries have had little or no exposure to libraries because of either limited schooling or the more limited role that libraries play in education in many countries. Typical college-level library orientation lectures may be inappropriate for LEP students, and even alphabetization may be unfamiliar. Close collaboration of English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) instructors and library professionals is recommended. Activities used at Union County College are divided into three broad language proficiency levels. At the lowest level, card catalog organization lessons, handouts in different languages on the Dewey decimal system, and use of public libraries is recommended. At the intermediate level, encyclopedias are used to provide practice in skimming and note-taking, use of periodical indexes is taught, and regular newspaper of magazine reading is often required. Advanced students summarize their weekly articles, use computers more, study research strategies, and often have segmented assignments to learn more complex research procedures. A brief list of references is provided. (MSE)

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Lynn Whitnall Meng & Mark Meng

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DEVELOPING LIBRARY AND RESEARCH SKILLS FOR ESL STUDENTS

Lynn Whitnall Meng & Mark Meng

Presented at TESOL '94, Baltimore

In ESL, there is usually agreement that students need exposure to library resources and we usually include a few visits to the library in the ESL curriculum. However, we may underestimate how much practice students require to develop competence in library use. Many ESL students have never before used the library in their native countries. Even those who are well-educated might have minimal experience in library use because of the different function that libraries serve in their countries. (Wayman, 1986). Libraries in some cases are not an integral part of the school system and are intended only for a select group of scholars. Furthermore, independent research at the secondary school or even undergraduate level may not be emphasized to the same extent as in the U.S. Students lacking experience in library skills and in independent research need far more than a brief tour of the library. They will benefit from a series of assignments in successive courses of instruction to expose them to the resources of the library, develop their investigative skills, and acquaint them with research procedures. Thus, we believe that the development of library skills should be incorporated into the ESL curriculum at each level.

Students in the U.S. are taught how to use a card catalog and even in many schools today, how to perform an online computer search in elementary school. They undertake projects requiring independent research in the lower grades. These skills are developed as they move on through middle school and high school. It is taken for granted that at the college level students have had considerable exposure to the basic concepts involved in searching through indexes and in the research process. However, ESL students often have had little practice in using card catalogs or searching through indexes, and therefore need extensive practice in using the various reference tools, whether print or computer-based. This may be especially true for students whose native languages are not alphabetically-based.

We believe that an ESL curriculum incorporating the development of library skills should be created through the close collaboration of ESL and library professionals. ESL faculty may not be familiar with the latest library technologies or resources and librarians may not be aware of the needs of ESL students at various levels; therefore collaboration between the two professionals is important to enhance the students' library experience and maximize efficient use of the library (Ball & Mahony, 1987).

Following is a discussion of library projects undertaken at Union County College at successive levels of

ESL. At UCC, the ESL population reflects diversity in many aspects. There are students from over 50 countries ranging in age from 16 to 70. One of the most significant differences besides language diversity is the range in educational background. Some students have professional degress from their native countries, while others are barely literate in their native languages. Students may be quite frustrated at having to spend semesters in ESL and are chafing at the bit to take major courses; this is especially true for those who graduate from American high schools and find themselves back in ESL. For many students the library projects are very satisfying. They are able to read material of their own choosing instead of just what is in the reading text or what faculty have selected. Not only is motivation higher, but students are able to use reading strategies such as predicting and guessing from context more successfully when they are familiar with the content. Thus from beginning to advanced levels of ESL, we encourage students to utilize the resources of the library at UCC.

Lower Levels

Unless one is lucky enough to encounter a librarian who has had considerable experience in working with an ESL population, the standard orientation to the library will probably go right over the heads of lower level students. At these levels, visits to the library will be more effective amd more productive if organized by ESL faculty in consultation with librarians. If card catalogs are still available, exercises introducing their system of organization could be done in the classroom before a library visit. At UCC, the librarians have prepared handouts in several languages explaining the dewey decimal system and have created a separate collection of "basic" readings for lower-level ESL students.

Public libraries are also a good option at this level. The young adult section, in particular, the non-fiction, is well-suited for ESL. Since many students are headed for careers in health, science, business, or engineering fields, non-fiction is more appealing and more relevant than fiction. Advanced-beginning or low-intermediate students can do book reports on books of their own choosing. It is important to let students choose content according to <u>their</u> interests and goals to increase motivation and to strengthen vocabulary in an area of their needs. Simpler language yet intellectuallly stimulating content are to the best interest of adult ESL students.

Intermediate Levels

Encyclopedias are a good option at the intermediate level, providing practice in skimming and notetaking. Each student can be actively involved in reading a particular volume. For example, students could research famous

immigrants or famous African-Americans and give a follow-up oral presentation in class. Encyclopedias offer immediate gratification and are therefore an enticing introduction to using the library for research purposes.

Students at this level should also be introduced to some periodical or newspaper indexes. The Reader's Guide is a good starting point if still available. An in-class assignment in scanning a sample page of The Reader's Guide should be done before a library visit. In this way students will absorb more of the librarian's explanation. An exercise to quickly do in the library is to find the citations for three articles aobut one's native country and list title, author, journal, date, and page number (it takes a bit of practice for some students to locate these within the index). In any exercise, a complete search cycle should be emphasized, from locating an index listing to actually getting the article in hand, because only through the whole process can students realize all they need to know in order to become independent learners. Librarians at UCC have discouraged "scavenger hunt" type activities in the library; these sometimes appear pointless to students and are less satisfying than a complete search.

Another assignment for a reading class at the intermediate level is to read one newspaper or mazazine article every week related to one topic. Most students choose a topic focusing on their intended major, such as finance, the environment, family issues, computers, AIDS treatment, etc. They should be encouraged to explore a variety of periodicals offered at the college library. Each week the student turns in a copy of the article and a brief reaction. The emphasis is on reading and browsing through the periodical section, not formal writing. The same topic is followed by the student all semester in order to develop vocabulary in one area of interest and to make students aware of the availability of various levels of information.

It is a revelation to many international students that libraries maintain back issues of magazines and newspapers. Learning how to access these materials is an empowering experience that puts the students in control. They can select and locate their own materials rather than relying on articles chosen for them by a teacher or textbook. All the library activities done at the intermediate level should be incorporated into regular assignments. For example, speeches, debates, discussions can be enhanced by requiring students to use several articles or encyclopedias as background material.

Advanced Levels

Many of the activities described above can be utilized at the advanced level. The weekly journal article assignment at this level could require a summary instead of a reaction. The summary is quite difficult for many students as it involves not only reading skills in determining main ideas

and synthesizing concepts, but also writing skills of paraphrasing and writing concisely (Kirkland & Suandes, 1991). These skills are of course essential in writing research papers and require extensive practice.

Students are quite excited at this level to discover CD-ROM indexes for locating journal and newspaper articles. They do need considerable practice, however, in learning how to conduct an efficient and fruitful search. At the advanced level, students will benefit from close collaboration between ESL faculty and librarians. Most librarians will have exercises for students to practice using various indexes, both print and computer-based.

At this stage, students need library projects focusing not only upon library resources, but also upon research strategies and critical thinking skills. These strategies and skills help a student formulate a general conceptual framework of how to approach a research project such as an oral presentation, a debate, or a term paper; how to narrow down a topic for a search; how to determine the level of information and how to evaluate and weed through a list to find pertinent articles. Students have to be made aware that in this age of the information explosion, the problem with research is not that one cannot find information, but rather that there is too much of it (Williams, 1990). A student might at first be delighted to find hundreds of references listed in an online search, but will have tremendous difficulty in weeding through such a list.

Particularly at the advanced level, segmented assignments can be most benefical; otherwise an assignment can seem overwhelming. Several sessions in the library along with library-related classroom activities provide guidance throughout the process of library research. For example, CD-ROM lists of articles and abstracts can be distributed in class for practice in analyzing which articles would be relevant and appropriate for a particular topic. Summaries and outlines of articles turned in **before** a debate or draft of a paper facilitate the early stages of a research project.

The emphasis in all of these suggestions is to provide students with repeated exposure to the library and develop research skills and critical thinking skills over a period of time. This necessitates library visits during class and outside assignments done independently or in small groups. There is high motivation for such assignments since they empower students to become independent learners. Encouraging students to feel confident in the library will give them access to more material and information than we can ever provide in our classrooms. They will make more profitable use of their public and college libraries and will achieve a higher degree of success in their research.

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